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TOBACCO

LAWSON H. SHELFER

The subject "Tobacco" is of great importance to the agricultural people of the United States. While tobacco is not a necessity, humanity has taken to the use of it as a luxury, and it is needless to say that from the crowned heads of the highest nations to the lowliest of our humanity the use and relish of this luxury in its various forms is almost universal. There are millions of dollars spent annually for this luxury and while the weed grows in the tropics, semi-tropics and even in the torrid zones, still there are only special places that grow a special tobacco. There are three important features to tobacco culture, the first being soil that is adapted to the special weed, second, climate, and third, experience in handling.

SOIL

The most important part of tobacco culture is the soil. While the plant will grow luxuriantly on any soil where vegetables will grow, still the soil gives the leaf its quality and flavor, so a special soil is needed for every kind or variety of the tobacco leaf. In the chewing tobacco section of the United States is a large area that grows this variety, still there is only a small amount of the soil that will produce a quality of high commercial value. Sometimes the soil can be stimulated with a fertilizer that will greatly improve the quality and at the same time it will only improve the quality on the soil most adaptable for the special plant. You can take a soil that is adaptable to a special variety of tobacco and that will grow a fine leaf of a high commercial

value and in a stone's throw will be a soil that will produce a leaf nearly worthless. Take an old tobacco section, such as Cuba, where the highest grade cigar tobaccos is produced, and you will find that it can grow a high grade only on a small section. Here and there, sometimes in a little narrow strip, while the adjoining lands produce a luxuriant plant of tobacco which is worthless to the trade. This applies to all of the cigar tobacco sections of the world. Florida, Connecticut, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Texas, and in all the states that produce a cigar leaf, you will find the same conditions, the choice soil in every section where the cigar leaf is produced being very limited. In the same way you will find the chewing tobacco, smoking, cigarette and snuff varieties have a special locality or a special soil that will bring the highest prices, so there is no hesitation in stating that the soil is the foundation of the cultivation of tobacco of any variety. This also applies to almost any class of agricultural products. The agricultural people of the United States to-day do not devote enough time to classifying the soil and to planting the crop that is best adapted to it. That is why the United States Department of Agriculture, through the Bureau of Soils, has devoted so much time during the past few years to the analysis and classification of the soils of different sections, and to-day the most essential point to take from an agricultural view, is to have your soil analyzed and see if you can supply by chemicals what is needed for the agricultural crop that you may want to grow.

CLIMATE

The climate has a great deal to do in itself and it takes different climatic conditions to raise different crops

successfully. Tobacco will grow in almost any climate from almost any seeds, wherever any vegetation will grow. It does best in the tropical or semi-tropical climates, and the highest valued tobacco from a commercial standpoint is produced in such climates. Still valuable tobacco can be grown further North than any grain crops. Climate and soil make the different varieties of tobaccos. For instance, you can take seed of a pure variety from the choice section of Cuba and the same from the island of Sumatra, and then from any state in the Union and plant them all in Texas or in any other locality, and they will eventually run into one variety which is most adaptable for that climate and soil. If the climatic condition was all that was necessary the entire island of Cuba would produce the famous Vuelta Abaja tobacco, or the entire island of Sumatra would produce the famous Delhi Sumatra wrapper, or the entire state of Virginia would grow the high-priced chewing tobacco wrapper, and the same would be true of any other state with respect to its most famous variety. So it is plain to say that the climatic conditions go with the soil.

While dwelling on this point it will be well to point a word of warning to the tobacco growers of the United States; that is, if you are growing a special variety of tobacco. Either cigar filler, wrapper, chewing tobacco (wrapper or filler) snuff or cigarette tobacco grow from the highest grade seed from the section that is most adaptable to the variety that your soil and climate is suited to. Take the cigar tobacco, with which I am more familiar than any other. We want our filler tobaccos of the Southern states or the semi-tropical climate raised from seed from the Vuelta Abaja district of Cuba, for the reason that there is where the

world's highest grade filler tobaccos for cigar purposes is raised. Wrapper tobaccos can be grown in this climate from the same seed that is used for filler as it is in Cuba. Still there is a great deal of our soil more adapted to raising a high grade wrapper from the Sumatra seed, which should come from the Delhi district of Sumatra. If you are going to raise a high grade of chewing tobacco, go to the section of Kentucky, Virginia or North Carolina that grows the best commercial tobacco and get your seed there. The same applies to any tobaccos of any of our states. We can raise a thinner fiber of wrapper leaf of the various grades by erecting a lattice frame and by covering it with cheese cloth, or coarse gauze for shade. This will hold moisture near the surface and regulate the temperature so as to give a more rapid growth and thinner fibered plant. This is desirable only for the various varieties used for wrapper purposes.

HANDLING

Handling is the third and one of the most important of all points to remember. You can take soil, climate and seed, and without skill you will make a failure ; or you take either of the three above mentioned points—soil, climate, or skill—and without all three combined, the whole is a failure. The cultivation of tobacco of various kinds, in various sections, is very simple to any man who is familiar with any branch of agriculture. Still, there is a great deal of science, even in growing plants, transplanting and cultivation. But any practical farmer who can grow a grain or vegetable crop of any kind, can produce tobacco to this stage. When the time comes for topping the plant, it is necessary to have a practical man to understand just exactly the number

of leaves to top, and know what soil and climate will mature perfectly. This applies to all varieties of tobacco and to all sections. In other words, it is necessary to gain some experience from the local growers of any section which produces a high type of tobacco that is adaptable to their section.

As to the ripening and harvesting of the plant, it is also very necessary to have a person who has a practical knowledge of the local plant of his section or of the climatic conditions of the country.

After the tobacco is harvested, the burden is not entirely over. It takes experience of handling the different varieties in the different sections so as to get the best results. This is why the Department of Agriculture of the United States is spending so much time and money in experimenting to obtain the best methods of preparing for the market every variety in every section.

COMMERCIAL VALUES OF DIFFERENT TOBACCOS

The United States today, while producing enormous amounts of tobaccos of various kinds and used for different purposes, imports from Cuba filler tobaccos for which we pay the Cuban agriculturist about eight million dollars per annum. The import duty on this tobacco being five or six million dollars, making a total of about fourteen million dollars for filler tobacco, which could be produced in Texas, Florida, or where there are similar soils and similar climates. This would mean more to the agricultural people of the state of Texas than the revenue derived from almost any other crop. The soils and climatic conditions of Texas will produce this filler tobacco. Notwithstanding that we compete only with the filler tobaccos of the island of Cuba, we

compete with the wrapper of Sumatra. This latter amounts to millions for the importation, while we have soils where we can apply the skillful methods of our advanced American people, and by using the above mentioned methods of artificialing by shade, we can give this amount to our American agriculturists.

Notwithstanding that there are a great many cigars imported in their manufactured state from Cuba, Mexico and other countries, we American farmers can compete and hold our own by paying strict attention to, and by studying out the conditions, the needs, and wants of our American people.